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http://790talknow.com/foxfeedspro/details/item_305039/navajo-prez-says-suicides-spiked-after-epa%E2%80%99s-gold-king-mine-disaster/

Navajo Prez Says Suicides Spiked After EPA's Gold King Mine Disaster

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Navajo suicides have allegedly spiked since the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) caused three million gallons of toxic waste from the Gold King Mine to spill into the native American's main water supply last August.

At least 15 Navajo have committed suicide since the spill, which contaminated the San Juan River – a crucial water source for the nation — according to Navajo President Russell Begaye, who noted that number doesn't include unsuccessful attempts.

"Our suicides started like three weeks after the spill occurred," Begaye told The Daily Caller News Foundation. He couldn't say "whether they're directly related," but said he believes the visibly polluted river "aggravated urges" of those who were already "vulnerable."

That many suicides over just seven months is "unusual," Begaye said, though he couldn't provide figures for the same period in 2015. The Navajo Nation already sees a disproportionate number of suicides compared to the rest of the U.S., The Daily Beast reported in January, when the suicide count was only six.

The EPA declined to comment on the suicides.

No EPA employee or contractor has been disciplined or otherwise punished for the Gold King Mine incident, and there is currently no criminal investigation into the spill. Conversely, the Flint, Mich., water crisis led to several resignations and terminations, and a multi-agency investigation.

Begaye has been highly critical of how the EPA handled the disaster that resulted from seriously mistaken actions taken by agency employees and contractors.

"The Gold King Mine spill culturally and economically devastated the Navajo Nation, and the federal government's failed response to this crisis has only added insult to injury," Begaye said in a recent statement.

The EPA response created an "environment of distrust," which, when coupled with a polluted physical environment, fueled preexisting suicidal urges, Begaye told TheDCNF. The spill harmed farmers' crops and forced the Navajo Nation to haul water from other sources, he said.

The Navajo are awaiting an estimated \$1 million in compensation from the EPA.

"I know we'll only get a fraction of it," Begaye told TheDCNF. "They'll fight us for every penny. That's how they operate. It's an injustice to the Navajo nation, to the farmers and to the people who have been hurt, and it's just wrong to treat our people in this manner."

Begaye claimed EPA officials waited for the intense media attention prompted by the disaster to die down before playing hard ball. "We predicted this was going to happen," he said.

The Navajo aren't alone in their fight. New Mexico recently requested \$1.5 million from the EPA, and 51 individuals requested \$5 million, reported The Durango Herald.

The Navajo Nation and the states of New Mexico and Utah threatened to sue the agency if they aren't compensated. Colorado Democrats killed a state legislative bill that would have allowed the state to sue the EPA, making it the only affected territory to forgo legal action, TheDCNF previously reported.

"On March 10, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided \$157,756 to Navajo Nation government agencies for costs incurred during the response to the August 2015 Gold King Mine release," an EPA spokesman told TheDCNF. "EPA is continuing to review other response costs submitted by Navajo Nation."

"Through a separate process, EPA is continuing to review individual claims asserted pursuant to the Federal Tort Claims Act," she said. "EPA is making \$2 million available for State and Tribal grant application to perform monitoring to address both early warning and seasonal monitoring."

But the spill impacted the Navajo most, according to Begaye.

Even though Gold King Mine is located in Colorado, the elevated terrain kept contaminants flowing until the river flattened out in Navajo territory. "When it gets to Navajo land, the flow really slows down so the flow isn't strong enough to move contaminants down the river," he told TheDCNF.

The river still isn't safe for humans, contrary to EPA claims.

"All metals, at all sampling sites, were below these risk-based recreational screening levels," the EPA spokeswoman said.